May 25, 1971

Mr. John Leonard
Editor, New York Times
Sunday Book Review
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Leonard:

Three weeks ago, when I wrote about John Kaplan's (excuse the expression) "review" of my FRAME-UP, I did not know you had become editor of the Sunday Book Review. The last thing I had seen with your name is the review of Garrison's "Heritage of Stone".

Your silence since then has been a disappointment, more so after reading what Time had to say about you.

Also since then I have asked that two things be sent you: The Times editorial response to an inquiry about why the last two (favorable) paragraphs of your review of Garrison's book were excised from the later editions, and a new writing by Kaplan. Editorializing is not permitted in Times' reviews, the editor said, hence what you had to say that was good about Garrison's book did not belong. I spare you the obvious comparison and question. And Kaplan, to whom your section assigned the only book critical of government and the workings of the institutions of society in the King assassination, has since added further disqualification by writing for the USIA on the Angela Davis case.

The Times and Kaplan are far from the only case where reviews were assigned to partisans who pretend knowledge they do not have. Elmer Gertz, Warren Commission sycophant and one of Jack Ruby's last lawyers, accepted such an assignment from the Chicago Sun-Times, this after a) I had offered help in the Ruby defense and b) lacerated him quite publicly on Chicago TV for preting undistilled propaganda to my face. His chief complaint about me was expressed in libel, that I was part of a conspiracy to "frame" Clay Shaw. In all aspects and overtones, this is total falsehood.

I write you not as an editor, not asking publication of this letter, but as a man concerned about the society in which he lives; about what has happened to it and to those who turn toward peace and a share of the national heritage for those so long denied it; about the distortion and corruption of all the means of justice; and about how any kind of representative society can function when it is either not told about information required for its functioning or given an entirely misrepresentative opinion of it, clearly designed to discourage interest in it, to kill it.

No, the Times is not alone. Every major show that aired the Foreman-Hanes-Huie combination, some fortified with a no-conspiracy fiction from Ramsey Clark, has refused to provide us opportunity for response. Yet mine, may I remind you, is the only book on the other side. And there is a law against electronic partisanship, the "fairness" doctrine of the FCC.

In Memphis I found no single black at all bitter about Ray. All of the many who spoke considered that, as there is no justice for them, there was none for him. It is that simple. I think for many that he was found guilty is sufficient to convince them of the opposite.

Has the law any more meaning for a writer with no resources, who bankrupts himself in the hope of doing a public service, of giving society and its institutions viability, than it has for Ray, or for so many Memphis blacks?

It has become a modern literary sin to write with passion about that which should arouse passion, and to document with thoroughness. For literary acceptability today (unless one be Agnew), one need ice for ink. So, I have come to expect and to live with denunciations of my style from the ivory towers. But works of nonfiction, especially those on pressing and current national issues, ought be judged on their content, on their validity, on their topicality, on the contributions they can or do make to a decent society, on the basis they lay for the rectification of evil, the righting of wrong.

Busy as you are, and not seeking redress of what I consider a designed injustice, as one man to another, I give you this challenge: Read and evaluate FRAME-UP yourself. Ask yourself if it is not of significant content, if much of it is not news, even in a book. Then go further, compare the headlines it anticipated that you have seen in these three weeks, of the mass illegal arrests, of the government claim its desires override the law and the Constitution and nobody has rights in the face of bureaucratic whim, and now of the right to jail without hearing or bail (and recall that as I alone exposed, the big gun imported for the forerunner of this "preventive detention" law is the judge who surrendered the sacred records of his own court to those who claim these new rights so that they could suppress all official copies of these public records).

I find myself wondering if I erred in saying it is Orwell who is alive and flourishing in Washington. Can it be Hitler, with junior-grade Goebbelses already lining up?

Do you want your review section used in any such fashion, for any such objectives?

I am, of course, perplexed at your silence after receiving a letter like mine. It was not just a letter from an aggrieved

writer. It raised basic questions about the integrity of your section I would think you would want to address, if only to record that you did not consciously assign this review to a man so ridden with irreconcilable conflicts. I hate to believe you or anyone else there did it on purpose.

If you did not kill an enormous and bankrupting labor that cannot possibly be financially rewarding, it will not be your fault.

Yours truly,

Harold Weisberg